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ABSTRACT

School principals are an important factor in the improvement of American schools. Key findings of two studies show that principals are the most significant people in the educational change process. Outlined are seven important steps involved in the process of instructional improvement that will take place only if committed and knowledgeable leadership is present in an effective principal. Effective/creative schools can be characterized as follows: (1) They are close to students and foster open working relationships between teachers and pupils; (2) Their principals work through and with people; (3) They focus on simple organizational form and lean management staff; and (4) They are governed by a practice called "simultaneous, loose-tight properties." Administrators, teachers, students, and the public will move toward improved instruction in the years to come through hard work and diligence. (MD)

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EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLING: EFFECTIVE STYLES FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

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EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLING: EFFECTIVE STYLES FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

The theme for this seminar segment, "Excellence in Schooling," is one which is finding increasing coverage in the literature today. Not many years ago, there were numerous forces in our society which reduced the principal's impact to that of a dime-store manager. Our fascination as Americans with the tools of management obliterated our apparent ignorance of the act of leadership. Our efforts in both corporations and school systems were biased toward measurement and analysis. It's a privilege to share this occasion with Dr. Nancy Guenther, Dr. Larry Lucas, Dr. Wayne Shaper, Dr. Tom Halbert, Dr. Dave Halstead, and Dr. Nicholas Troisi.

Today, all of this is changing very rapidly. Scale efficiencies giving ways to small units with turned-on people. Working according to fat rule books is being replaced by everyone's contributing, as is pointed out in the intriguing book In Search of Excellence. We hear more talk today of family feeling, small is beautiful, simplicity rather than complexity, hoopla associated with quality products and quality schools.

Throughout this century, American schools have been both the recipient of considerable praise and criticism by our publics. Not too long ago, our success as the victors in World War II was attributed to the influence and contribution of our elementary and secondary schools. Today, instead of finding ourselves in the role of T.S. Elliott's aristocratic "Bustopher Jones," most American schools find themselves in Elliott's role of the impoverished "Gus." The gap between glory and honor, disdain and poverty is indeed a short one.

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In recent years American schools have become the focal point of a multitude of studies. There are at this time some two dozen reports and studies in progress in the United States attempting to review our schools. Lower SAT scores, problems of alcohol and sex, are all at times attributed by the popular media to the failure of the American school system. Schools in the American society have the peculiar responsibility of serving as both academic institutions and as a "baby-sitting" function. Whereas in many western European societies the school is responsible for nothing other than academic functions, in the United States responsibilities range from counseling about personal problems, to athletics, to a myriad of societal concerns. Indeed American schools are expected to be all things to all people.

In the midst of such a conflicting array of pressures and responsibilities, is there any evidence that one can realistically anticipate the improvement of the quality of instruction in American schools? How can our schools re-claim some of their glitter from the past, while at the same time serving the vast array of children and young people who attend our schools. Can our schools once again be perceived by the American public as effective, productive units in the spectrum of American public education? The answer is yes, but with great effort, great trauma, and great difficulty.

Leadership

It is possible that the single most complex position in the spectrum of responsibility in American education is that of the school principal. This individual is expected to provide leadership in an institution which has become all things to all people. He or she is perceived as

a curriculum specialist, a manager of monies, a placater of diverse community points of view, a counselor to competent and incompetent students, a balanced "Rotarian" type citizen.

Principals indeed have a significant and an irreversible role to exercise in bringing about the instructional improvement of schools. Obviously, leadership at the local building level is a key factor in the improvement of instruction. A school is but the reflection of the shadow of its principal.

Unfortunately, some administrators lack the skills needed to involve their staffs in curriculum improvement. Preparation programs for principals rarely communicate such knowledge. Universities tend to emphasize school law, schoolhouse planning, school finance, etc. If instruction is to improve in American schools the principal's role must change. The basic commitment of the principal must be to the teaching staff and students. The fundamental responsibility of the principal is not just to maintain programs, but to insure that the process of education in the school goes forward appropriately. The principal must delegate routine matters in order to preserve energies and talents for his primary responsibility - instructional leadership. The findings of the Ford Foundation in its report, A Foundation Goes to School, are paralleled by the findings of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in the Model Schools Project, supported by the Danforth Foundation, published under the title, How Good is Your School? (Georgiades, 1978). One of the key findings of the Model Schools Project was that the most significant person in the change process is the building principal. While collective district efforts may assist in support, instruc-

tional improvement is still basically a process to be undertaken by a local faculty, its school management team, its pupil and its supporting community.

Leadership at the local building level must be aware and seek to implement a process for instructional improvement:

AWARENESS. An awareness must be developed that instructional improvement is needed. Schools which emphasize the fact that they are doing a good job today, and that there is no reason to change, have not looked beyond today. Social institutions often have a tendency to live on their past reputations.

INFORMATION. Once an awareness of sense of need for instructional improvement has developed, teachers and administrators must look carefully at the alternatives which are available. Where can they go to learn, who can help them in the learning process? How can they avoid the purchase and use of gadgetry which will make them look modern from an external point of view, but which will produce few real results internally? How do they avoid the "instant conversion" syndrome, the myth that they can "buy" instructional improvement.

ASSESSMENT. How does the faculty determine what will be most effective in its individual school climate? Our experiences in NASSP's Model Schools Project shows that such assessment demands total involvement of community, pupils, teachers, and the school management team.

MODIFICATION. After a school has proceeded through the steps of awareness, information, and assessment, steps must be taken to meet the instructional improvement needs of a particular school. Even in a project as specific as the Model Schools Project, it was necessary for schools in varying environments to make modifications.

PILOT. Once the necessary modifications have been made to improve instruction, the next step is to pilot some of the basic ideas for one or two years. In the initial phases of piloting, it is important to involve interested, committed persons.

MONITORING. After the instructional program has been implemented it is essential that systematic evaluation be undertaken. Evaluation should be formative in the early stages of a project to enable mid-course corrections. Evidence must support the instructional improvement method which has been adopted to assist pupils in attaining objectives which were not achieved previously. The program and its effectiveness must be supported by data gathered with the use of standardized instruments, criterion-referenced tests, observations, attitudinal devices, and the like. More importantly, unless changes in behavior occur, it is not likely that paper-and-pencil results will prove significant.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION. This last step occurs after the pilot program and the results of the monitoring process have indicated that the program for instructional improvement is now ready for school-wide implementation. The danger in institutionalization was aptly stated by Huxley when he said, "Yesterday's heresies become today's orthodoxies." Unless school systems use caution as they institutionalize they may lock themselves into instructional techniques and models which while effective today will be ineffective tomorrow. The process of improving instruction is a continuing one; it is not an instant one step, one phase process.

Little if any of the preceeding will take place unless leadership at the local building level is committed and knowledgeable. The "principal-teacher", more than any other individual, determines the quality of

instruction in a school. Although instructional improvement is implemented by teachers and students with the help and understanding of parents, other taxpayers, central office persons, and a host of agencies, the fact remains that the person in charge sets the tone and the methodology of instruction. As an instructional leader, the principal's job is to help the people in the school make educational programs work. There is no program that you can buy or create that will improve instruction in a school unless the people who work there want to make it work.

Improving instruction often requires different instructional methods and/or new materials. Changing educational practice is intrinsically disruptive. Change threatens people; it upsets the established routines, it takes extra energy and time; it challenges the status quo. As Dr. B. Dell Felder and I reported in an article titled, "Leadership for Strengthening Basic Skills Education," the principal is the person who must provide the leadership for improvement. The principal must recognize that a problem exists and that improvement is necessary. The principal must create a shared concern for improving the situation by involving teachers and deciding what is to be done and by orchestrating people and resources to accomplish the task. Indeed without the commitment and leadership of the principal most efforts to improve programs will never get off the ground. It is the principal who must provide the energy for change.

The principal must play a variety of roles and realize that those roles will change as the process of improving the program evolves. In studying principals who successfully implemented new programs in their schools, Spencer Wyatt in Projects and Principals found that the successful principal was many things:

> ...he or she was a believer, feeling a genuine commitment to the project; an advocate who promoted and defended the project before a variety of audiences, a linker who connected the project with other parts of the system; a resources acquirer who obtained and allocated tangible and intangible resources for the project; an employer who hired project staff or assigned teachers to it; a leader who supplied initiative, energy, and direction; a manager who provided problem-solving assistance and support; a delegator who "moved backstage" when teachers assumed leadership; a supporter with words of encouragement and acts of assistance; and an information source who gave feedback to teachers and project staff.

Characteristics of Effective/Creative Schools

In our studies and review of the research of effective schooling, we have found four attributes that seem to emerge and most nearly characterize the excellent/creative schools. First, effective schools stay close to their students and foster an open working relationship between teachers and pupils. While standards are made clear, and adhered to, there is also a sense of comraderie, a sense of "I care", a sense of the role of the teacher-advisor on the part of faculty and administrators toward the customer, who, after all, is the student. Secondly, effective principals work through and with people. They do not foster a "we-they" labor attitude, which pits the classroom teacher against school management. Three, the majority of the effective schools which we have visited focus on simple form and lean staff. They are characteristically not run with highly complex, matrix organizational structures and charts. There is an openness and a flow, and their management teams are lean. And the fourth characteristic which we have found is a practice called in the business world simultaneous, loose-tight properties.

People are their most important asset, they live by their commitment to people as they do their preference for action. The truly effective principals are those who manage the values of the school as well

as the curriculum and program. The most effective schools combine a tablespoon of sound planning and analysis, diagnosis, with a pint of love - both are indispensible.

The leadership styles of principals in such schools place a strong focus and emphasis upon respect and belief in the productivity or potential productivity of teachers and students. Wandering around and informality, probably are not for everybody. On the other hand, I wonder without a peripatetic management style, how vital can a school really be? Leadership styles of effective principals are based upon respect for individuals, making people winners, letting people stand out, and treating people as adults. Such schools do not encourage persons to substitute rules for judgment. Effective schools are characterized by teachers and administrators and students who have found meaning, who have found a modicum of control, who think of themselves as winners, and whose actions and behaviors shape attitudes and beliefs, rather than vice versa.

What of Tomorrow

It is difficult to know what the nature of schooling will be tomorrow, but there are some indicators on the horizon which must be reviewed as we attempt to improve the quality of instruction. Either such quality will be improved and strengthened in our schools, or our clientele will select other alternatives for the education of their young.

In the book, How Good is Your School?, I emphasize many educational alternatives which are emerging as school systems seek to improve the quality of instruction. There is an increasing movement toward "disposable school systems and instructional models." This concept implies

that no school, no instructional model, no definition of prescribed or optional learning environments can expect to long endure. This is in marked contrast with many of the yesterdays where a kind of stability was sought and found in what was then known as "current practice."

Instruction must reflect what the word "quality" implies. Automatic progress can no longer be automatic. Advancement must be based on achievement and competency. On the other hand, schools dare not penalize persons they refuse to assist in the achievement of learning objectives. Not all persons can progress at the same rate. Quality instructional systems must recognize this and make adjustments to meet both remedial and advanced instructional goals for their students.

School systems must cease equating seat time with credit. Instruction will tend to improve as it increasingly reflects the demands and commitments of parents, students and other adults. The pressures of the last twenty-five traumatic years, which resulted in the lowering of standards by state legislatures, will not continue. A high school diploma cannot be awarded to persons because of their origin. A diploma must indicate quality experience and learning. Of course, such thinking implies that school systems will make adaptations and will adjust teaching models to reach the vast majority of their young people. Benjamin Bloom's research is something we dare not forget - 90% of our clientele can achieve mastery if we will address the issues of time and methodology.

Substantial changes will occur in classrooms through the impact of computers, a variety of new kinds of media, and new teaching methodologies. We will see the increased adaptation of practices which base credit upon performance, not upon time. We will see an expanded application

of the process of diagnosis, prescription and evaluation rather than starting all at the same point in time. We will see increasing usage of models of "continuing learning," with persons leaving and re-entering schooling at a variety of times during their life.

Summary

Many principals and teachers have sought to improve instruction. Such efforts have not always been neat and orderly, and cannot always be made so. But idealism and concern run strong among the educators whose dedication has led to improved instruction. They are among those who wish to not only fit in with the future, but also to participate in the choosing of it.

We will undoubtedly see many starts and stops in the movement toward improved instruction. There will be a better balance between group and individual instruction. Learning is individual, even though much of it can occur in clusters or groups. We are awakening, after a long dormant "Rip Van Winkel sleep" to a new tomorrow. The task which faces us is complex. Process and progress necessary to improve the quality of instruction in American schools will be arduous. Many persons, many school systems, who do not possess the stamina of the high altitude porter will never climb the "Mount Everest" of education and achieve the objective of significantly improved instruction. Such systems will fall by the way. They will become critics of the process which they are unable to master. Their intellectual stamina will falter, and they will write popular books which criticize efforts to improve instruction.

Nevertheless, the handwriting on the wall is clear. Gradually, surely, with determination, administrators, teachers, students and our

publics will move toward improved instruction in American schools. The miracle of such improved instruction will not occur tomorrow, but through hard work and diligent application it will emerge in the years to come.

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